

Monticello/Drew County, Arkansas

Monticello/Drew County Community Profile

Monticello is located in Drew County, Arkansas one county west of the Mississippi River in a region called the Mississippi River Delta. Much of the information for the area is available at the county level, and it comes from a variety of sources compiled in different years.

Agriculture is important to the county, which produces soybeans and timber.

The non-farm economy of Drew County is driven by *services, retail trade, and manufacturing*, which have the largest numbers of employees. In 1997, there were 6,884 employees in the county, 42 percent in manufacturing (including lumber and saw mills), 25 percent in services, and 20 percent in retail trade. The comparison to Arkansas is shown in the following Table.

Employees	Drew Co.	Arkansas
Manuf'ing	42%	27%
Services	25%	29%
Retail Trd.	20%	22%

There were 454 establishments in Drew County in 1997, with 30 percent in retail trade and 28 percent in services. Two of the establishments employed more than 500 persons; 68 percent of them employed fewer than 20 persons.

Estabmts.	Drew Co.	Arkansas
Retail Trd.	30%	26%
Services	28%	34%
Manuf'ing	14%	7%

The population of Drew County was estimated at 17,449 on July 1, 1999, down 0.1 percent from the year before. Population was up 2.1 percent from 1990 to 1997. In 1996, the population was 69.8 percent white and 29.9 percent black.

Educational attainment in Drew County, for persons 25 years and over in 1990, was 63.1 percent for high school graduates (compared to 66.3 percent for the state) and 13.9 percent for college graduates (compared to 16.1 percent for the state).

Per capita income in Drew County was \$11,374 in 1990 (\$13,784 for the state) and \$14,682 in 1994 (\$16,863 for the state).

The Arkansas Workshop

Based on the TEAM Delta workshop held in Monticello, Arkansas on May 2, 2000, the current major issues in Drew, Phillips, and Desha Counties include:

- Education,
- Connectivity,
- Visionary leadership,
- Industry, and
- Loss of population.

Participants in the workshop also identified barriers and opportunities.

Obstacles

Major obstacles appear to be:

- **education** in general;
- **social capital**, including lack of trust (or teamwork, cooperation, or collaboration) and racial barriers; and
- **vision**, described variously as the belief that things can be different and better, seeing a way out of poverty, thinking outside the box, positive attitude, direction, good image, and not being resistant to change.

Opportunities

Major Opportunities include:

- **Natural resources**;
- **Sense of community** built around a good location, small town atmosphere, and emerging community leadership; and
- **New opportunities**, including eco-tourism, new markets, technology, micro-enterprise, changes in education, investments in people,

distance learning, and the ability to influence what is going on.

Workshop Evaluation

A follow-up evaluation/survey of workshop participants revealed community impressions about the topics offered at the workshop. The topics generally addressed how to create more local wealth and higher paying jobs, and information about the new technology-based economy. Monticello participants in the Arkansas workshop viewed the topics in the following way:

Highly Useful

Value-Added
Social Capital
Science & Technology
Entrepreneurs
Workforce
Clusters and Networks
Venture Finance

Average Usefulness

Traded Sector
Time-to-Market

Low Usefulness

International Trade
Service Economy

The evaluation/survey also measured the popularity of strategies for technology-based economic development. Monticello participants in the Arkansas workshop assessed a list of strategies, as shown below:

Most Popular

Community Technology Plan
Industrial Networks
University Tech Transfer
Tech-focused Training
Improving K-12
Manufacturing Extension
Entrepreneurial Education

Some Popularity

Tech Business Incubator
Focused Recruitment
Angel Investor Network

Little Popularity

Research Park

The Community Technology Assessment

The Monticello Community Technology Assessment was held June 20, 2000.

TEAM DelTA Community Assessment

Eleven community residents, members of Monticello's Network Planning Committee, participated. The session began with introductions followed by the TEAM Delta facilitator asking three questions concerning their attitudes about different kinds of investments.

The first question asked participants to assume that they had \$100 to spend on the following three things: (a) recruiting businesses to the community, (b) assisting existing business to expand, and (c) helping new, start-up businesses. The \$100 could be divided among the three things in any proportion desired. The Monticello participants allocated their collective \$1100 for recruiting (\$410), start-up companies (\$375), and existing firms (\$315).

The second question asked participants to assume that they had \$100 to spend on the following three things: (a) education, training, and human resource development, (b) technology transfer and development, and (c) capital investments. The \$100 could be divided among the three things in any proportion desired. The participants allocated their collective \$1100 for education (\$555), technology (\$400), and much less (\$145) allocated for capital investment.

The third question was whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that the Internet was changing everything. Nine of the 11 agreed and added unsolicited comments indicating that the process of exchanging information and access to new information is enhancing learning, "It's changing the way we learn, do business, entertain," and "Because the internet is bringing us together as a world wide community. Two persons disagreed, explaining, "Basic human needs involving emotions, feelings, etc. cannot be replaced by technology," and "It changes our modes of communication/work and affects some behavior patterns; much of human behavior will go on as it has."

These warm-up questions were followed by discussion and compiling four lists of technology resources.

Discussion about key firms, those adding value, exporting, and paying higher wages, led to the following list: Maxwell Hardwoods, Timberland Enterprises, J.B. Price Lumber Company, Seaark Boats, Inc., and War Eagle Boats.

Discussion about business partners that contribute to the success of key firms generated the following list: King wood Forestry, ESA (Employers Services of America), accounting firms, banks, timber sellers/haulers, and trucking/railroads.

The discussion was robust as the group tackled the list of soft infrastructure resources (e.g., schools, medical clinics, etc.) in the community. TEAM Delta used the following five organizations for analytical purposes: MEDC (Monticello Economic Development Commission), University of Arkansas at Monticello, school districts, churches, and the Monticello Adult Education Center.

The preceding list, however, does not fully represent the breadth of the soft infrastructure resources that the participants discussed. Among other unique resources, they discussed Drew Memorial Hospital, hunting and fishing resources, youth sports, the Seaark Concert Association, and the people in the community who are change agents.

A Community Profile provided by the Arkansas Community of Excellence program at the Arkansas Department of Economic Development assisted the discussion about the hard infrastructure resources of the community. Monticello's infrastructure needs include:

1. Land for sewer and water expansion (which are outside the community) and more water lines out of the city;
2. Telecommunications infrastructure, redundancy in connectivity, more bandwidth;
3. Improved air service and a longer runway;
4. A civic center;
5. A strategic plan for infrastructure;
6. More public transportation (they recognize that the demand is relatively small);
7. Ponds from which to draw water for rural fire protection (this is outside the city);
8. Shopping infrastructure; and

9. Housing (especially rental housing).

The closing question for the group was what they wanted Monticello to be known for five years from now. Answers focused on Monticello as a progressive community and a hub in Southeast Arkansas for healthcare and technology. Another theme was educational excellence. Several examples follow; I want Monticello to be known for:

- ☐ Its leisure and recreation aspects while growing business and industry. Expanding homegrown companies is a better way of keeping jobs here. Focus recruiting on higher paying jobs, not assembly types, to have more to offer to college graduates and keep people here in Monticello.
- ☐ Higher wages and higher retention of high school and college graduates.
- ☐ Entrepreneurial support and economic opportunity.
- ☐ City/county/state connectivity.
- ☐ My vision for Monticello in five years, I would like to have an abundance of opportunities; business, educational, personal and otherwise.

A follow-up mail survey was conducted. Participants in the Monticello community technology assessment were asked to estimate the "connectivity" among the various organizations they identified among key, firms, business partners, and the community's soft infrastructure. Their responses indicate their collective opinion that the most interconnected resources in their community are banks, Timberland Enterprises, and accounting firms.

Next Steps

Participants identified numerous implementation opportunities, including:

- Tomato growing industry offers value-added opportunities.
- There is an opportunity for a new business or two associated with Maxwell Hardwood Flooring.
- University of Arkansas at Monticello seems to be an underutilized resource, especially its library.
- More grad studies at UAM.
- Need shopping. People leave to go shopping/fine dining.